

Bamboozled by Rayon



“Bamboo” Bath Towel Testing

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Consumer Reports

Bath Towel Testing 2006

- Consumer Reports tested 27 Bath Towels and reported on them in October 2006
- There were five models in the project that contained rayon made from bamboo
- Only one model had sewn on labeling correctly identifying rayon as part of the fiber content

Fiber Content

- Lands' End correctly stated the toweling fiber content as 60% Cotton and 40% Rayon from Bamboo.



New Names for Old Fibers

- The other four “bamboo” towels in the project inaccurately stated “bamboo” as part of the fiber content.



“Bamboo” towels and hype

- The five “bamboo” towels in the project were a blend of cotton and rayon ranging from 50% cotton and 50% rayon to 70% cotton and 30% rayon
- This is a push when touting “BAMBOO” in large font.

Target Towels

- Target's "bamboo" towels were heavily marketed and the tag states:

064 02 0697

bamboo

50% bamboo / 50% cotton

bath towel

Natural softness and durability
Naturally eco-friendly,
antibacterial and breathable

Yes, that's right.
B a m b o o .
Surprisingly,
when bamboo is
made into fabric,
it feels nothing
at all like a plant.

In fact, it's **luxuriously soft**. That means bamboo is not only panda-friendly, it's **eco-friendly** too. And because it is, after all, from nature, bamboo is also naturally **durable**, naturally **antibacterial** and naturally **breathable**. Bamboo. Who knew?

home 

30 in x 58 in (76 cm x 147 cm)

So What does the Consumer Get?

- Bamboo-rayon & cotton blend towels from: Lands End, Lenox Platinum Collection, cb2 Bamboo, The Bombay Company Estate all cost \$20 or more.
- The Target “bamboo” towel cost \$8 and quickly disappeared from the shelves. This brand was no longer available at the time of our publication.
- Regular cotton towels in the project on average cost much less.

The Good Stuff

- Our sensory panelists found that the bamboo rayon towels were generally softer than cotton towels.

The Bad Stuff

- We did not find clearly superior products. In the case of towels, rayon-cotton blends generally have a ‘softer’ hand than cotton nevertheless they shrink, some pilled or turned into ‘bon-bons’ (the border shrinks up leaving a distorted towel) just like conventional cotton towels.
- The other item is that no “deep” or intense colors were available. All the rayon-blend towels at the time (2006) were pastel shades.

Renewable or a 'Weed'?

- Bamboo is a fast growing source of cellulose.
- Producers are cagey (for a good reason) about actual process specifics and this makes it very difficult for the consumer to assess the “eco-friendly” claim.
- We have confirmed one part of the claim; bamboo is considered ‘renewable’.
- Do note that some people consider bamboo to be a weed (just asks the facilities manager at CU Yonkers....)



Rayon Manufacturing

- Viscose rayon manufacturing is hardly benign it includes: pulping, Sodium Hydroxide, Sulfuric Acid, and lots of water and power.
- The details are the subject of a much longer presentation, or a Textile Science 101 lecture.

Greenwash?

- FTC definition of Rayon: (d) *Rayon*. A manufactured fiber composed of regenerated **cellulose**, as well as manufactured fibers composed of regenerated cellulose in which substituents have replaced not more than 15 percent of the hydrogens of the hydroxyl groups.
- Note – bamboo is not a generic fiber category as say lyocell is.

Conclusion

- The consumer is being lead to believe that she is purchasing a 'green' superior product
- The consumer is buying a cotton-rayon blend bath towel generally at a premium price
- The consumer gets, an ordinary bath towel that at best is a bit softer than a 100% cotton towel.